

# Four Skinny Trees

Sandra Cisneros

They are the only ones who understand me. I am the only one who understands them. Four skinny trees with skinny necks and pointy elbows like mine. Four who do not belong here but are here. Four raggedy excuses planted by the city. From our room we can hear them, but Nenny just sleeps and doesn't appreciate these things.

Their strength is secret. They send ferocious roots beneath the ground. They grow up and they grow down and grab the earth between their hairy toes and bite the sky with violent teeth and never quit their anger. This is how they keep. ©

10 Let one forget his reason for being, they'd all droop like tulips in a glass, each with their arms around the other. Keep, keep, keep, trees say when I sleep. They teach.

When I am too sad and too skinny to keep keeping, when I am a tiny thing against so many bricks, then it is I look at trees. When there is nothing left to look at on this street. Four who grew despite concrete. Four who reach and do not forget to reach. Four whose only reason is to be and be. ☞ ©

## © MOOD AND FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Reread lines 1–9. What human qualities do the trees have? What emotion is **personified**?

## © MOOD AND FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Reread lines 13–17. What words and phrases stand out to you? Consider the **mood** and meaning these words and phrases create.

## Analyze Visuals ►

What feeling or emotion do the colors of this image suggest to you?

# THE DELIGHT SONG OF TSOAI-TALEE

N. Scott Momaday

I am a feather on the bright sky  
I am the blue horse that runs in the plain  
I am the fish that rolls, shining, in the water  
I am the shadow that follows a child  
5 I am the evening light, the lustre of meadows  
I am an eagle playing with the wind **A**  
I am a cluster of bright beads  
I am the farthest star  
I am the cold of the dawn  
10 I am the roaring of the rain  
I am the glitter on the crust of the snow  
I am the long track of the moon in a lake  
I am a flame of four colors  
I am a deer standing away in the dusk  
15 I am a field of sumac and the pomme blanche<sup>1</sup>  
I am an angle of geese in the winter sky  
I am the hunger of a young wolf  
I am the whole dream of these things

You see, I am alive, I am alive  
20 I stand in good relation to the earth  
I stand in good relation to the gods  
I stand in good relation to all that is beautiful  
I stand in good relation to the daughter of Tsen-tainte<sup>2</sup>  
You see, I am alive, I am alive **B**

1. **pomme blanche** (pôm blānsh): a plant with heavy edible roots, also known as breadroot.

2. **Tsen-tainte**: a heroic and respected 19th-century Kiowa chief known for his bold raids on both white and Native American settlements.

## Analyze Visuals ▶

List the **images** you see in this collage. Which images portray aspects of nature?

### **A** MOOD AND FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Reread lines 1–6. Note the first several things that the poet compares himself to. What mood do these **metaphors** create?

### **B** REPETITION

Reread lines 19–24. Notice the **repetition** of certain phrases, such as “I stand” and “I am alive.” What effect does this repetition create?

Detail of *Four Directions* (1995), Jaune Quick-to-See Smith. Lithograph with linocut collage, 44.5" × 30". Photo provided by The Lawrence Lithography Workshop. Artwork © Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (an enrolled Flathead Salish, member of the Salish and Kootenai Nation Montana).

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## THE DELIGHT SONG OF TSOAI-TALEE / FOUR SKINNY TREES

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**Reading Strategy****SET A PURPOSE FOR READING**

If you **set a purpose** when you read, you will get more from your reading. Your purpose might be to learn specific information. Or, your purpose for reading might be just to have fun. In this lesson, your purpose for reading is to compare the moods of two pieces. Analyzing the figurative language can help you accomplish this purpose.

**Directions:** After you have read both poems, reread the selections again. Record examples of figurative language for each poem. Then write a word that describes the mood of each poem. An example has been done for you.

Figurative Language in "The Delight Song of Tsoai-Talee" (metaphors)	Figurative Language in "Four Skinny Trees" (personification)
"I am a feather on the bright sky"	
<b>Mood:</b>	<b>Mood:</b>

## THE DELIGHT SONG OF TSOAI-TALEE / FOUR SKINNY TREES

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**Question Support****LITERARY ANALYSIS***For questions 1–3, see page 618 of the Student Edition.***Directions:** Answer each question.

- 4. Analyze Figurative Language** Reread lines 1–10 of “The Delight Song of Tsoai-Talee.” The poet uses metaphors to compare himself to several things. Identify three of the metaphors. Then complete the following sentences.

The first metaphor is \_\_\_\_\_

It creates a feeling of \_\_\_\_\_

The second metaphor is \_\_\_\_\_

It creates a feeling of \_\_\_\_\_

The third metaphor is \_\_\_\_\_

It creates a feeling of \_\_\_\_\_

- 5. Interpret Meaning** N. Scott Momaday’s Native American name is “Tsoai-Talee,” which means “Rock Tree Boy.” It refers to a landform that is sacred to his people. The poet refers to Tsen-tainte, a brave Kiowa chief from the 1800s. The poet says that he is related to this chief’s daughter. Circle the sentence that describes what he means by the lines 23–24.

**a.** He is really dead.      **b.** The chief is long dead      **c.** His heritage is alive.

- 6. Make Inferences** Complete the following sentence with details from “Four Skinny Trees.”

Details that describe both the trees and the narrator are \_\_\_\_\_

- 7. Analyze Mood Personification** is a comparison that gives human qualities to an object, animal, or idea. The poet uses personification in “Four Skinny Trees” to create a certain mood. Circle a word in parentheses and complete the following sentences.

Three examples of personification are \_\_\_\_\_

The mood of “Four Skinny Trees” is (sad, determined, hopeful) because \_\_\_\_\_

## THE DELIGHT SONG OF TSOAI-TALEE / FOUR SKINNY TREES

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**Writing for Assessment**

Writing assessments are standardized tests that ask you to respond in specific ways. For example, you might be required to compare and contrast two literary works. You must answer the specific prompt and follow the guidelines. Since writing assessments are timed tests, it is important to plan your writing carefully. This helps you stay on track and include all relevant information.

**Directions:** Both the poem “The Delight Song of Tsoai-Talee,” and the vignette “Four Skinny Trees” convey mood through figurative language. However, the mood of each piece is quite different. Compare the two moods and the figurative language that helps create each mood. You may use the following outline or create your own on the back of this page.

**I. Introduction**

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**II. The mood of the poem and the language that communicates the mood**

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**III. The mood of the vignette and the language that communicates the mood**

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**IV. Conclusion**

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